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ABSTRACT

The National Association of State Directors of Vocational Technical Education Consortium (NASDVTEC) supports enactment of legislation that is dedicated solely to vocational-technical education (VTE). NASDVTEC urges the 105th Congress to build on the existing foundation of a strong state role in VTE by drafting legislation that achieves the following: focus federal investment in VTE on program improvement and elimination of barriers so that all students can have access to quality programs; build and expand on the current performance standards and measures system; develop a set of common definitions for data-reporting purposes; ensure that VTE dollars flow to a single state agency as described and defined in the Carl Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act; guarantee VTE leaders and educators representation on all boards, collaborative entities, or bodies; require that 20% of VTE funds be reserved for state education leadership and administrative activities; require a state match for state administration dollars; allow states to determine the split of funds between secondary and postsecondary systems; provide at least a $2.5 billion authorization level for VTE; and require professional development, curriculum development and field testing, and assessment activities at the state level. (A 16-item legislative priorities summary is included.) (MN)

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STATE DIRECTORS

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES FOR THE 105TH CONGRESS

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE DIRECTORS OF VOCATIONAL TECHNICAL EDUCATION CONSORTIUM

The National Association of State Directors of Vocational Technical Education Consortium (NASDVTEc) represents the state and territory leaders responsible for the vocational technical education system. Our members are committed to leadership and outstanding performance in vocational technical education at the secondary, post secondary and adult levels and are prepared and eager to work with you. It is our hope that these comments will begin our discussion and partnership to develop and enact federal legislation that provides specific authority and funding for the continuation and advancement of the vocational technical education system.

We support enactment of legislation dedicated solely to vocational technical education. The legislation should include the opportunity for flexibility, adaptation and change, as they are essential components of a system of continuous improvement. We urge you to build on the existing foundation of a strong state role by providing 20% of vocational technical education funds to a single state education agency, 15% for state leadership activities and only 5% for state administration.

Vocational technical education provides a *first-chance* for our nation's youth to enter the workforce or pursue further education and for adults to focus their education and pursue vocational and technical credentials. It is an education system that believes that *all students* can achieve at higher levels. We take seriously our responsibility to capacitate individuals with the skills and competence to assure career success. We urge you to consider the positive impact vocational technical education has on individuals, businesses and our economy while working through this legislative process. All benefit.

Vocational technical education stands ready to meet the challenges of a global economy and to assure our workforce has the skills to meet those challenges.

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PURPOSE

Focus the federal investment in vocational technical education on program improvement and elimination of barriers so that any student can have access to quality programs.

Enact a piece of authorizing legislation dedicated solely to vocational technical education.

The federal funds, dedicated to vocational technical education, will work to bring learners to the level of competence required in the current and future workplace, defined and validated by partnerships with business, industry and labor. At the secondary level, vocational technical education provides a 'first chance' that allows youth to successfully enter the workforce and pursue other education opportunities. Federal funds work to assure a seamless transition for students from the secondary to post secondary programs. At the post secondary level, vocational technical education provides opportunities for adults to focus their education and pursue vocational and technical credentials.

These funds should be used for long-term education efforts that result in careers, not short-term training programs. The nation stands to benefit by using this federal commitment as leverage to capitalize on the knowledge, infrastructure and experience of the existing vocational technical education system, which includes 25,000 secondary institutions and 2,000 post secondary institutions and serves more than eleven million students each day.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Build on and expand the current performance standards and measures system.

Vocational technical education holds firmly the belief that the system must be held to and driven by high standards. Perkins was the vehicle used to develop one of the nation's first systems of performance standards and measures. Many dollars and much time have been dedicated to the development of the existing performance standards and measurement system. **We urge you to build on that system and save resources.**

Given that there is a system in place, we recognize that there are improvements that can be made. NASDVTEc encourages the use of program standards to assure all customers (employers, employees, students, etc.) can make informed choices. Examples of this may include placement (employment results of graduates, retention rates, number of students pursuing further training, etc.) and competency attainment measures (meeting national skill standards, academic standards, skill certification, etc.). In addition, states should measure enrollment in and successful completion of the vocational technical education programs by diverse populations to assure states are meeting their obligation of providing equitable access to quality programs.

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ACCOUNTABILITY (CONTINUED)

Develop a set of common definitions for data reporting purposes.

A uniform set of common nomenclature would provide comparable data which would allow states to measure and compare progress. Common definitions are essential to collect data in a meaningful, uniform and timely manner. This data will allow the vocational technical education system and the nation to respond to the changing economy, occupational mixes and demands and provide necessary accountability to the Congress, Administration, states, and its customers (employers, employees and students).

NASDVTEc strongly supports the use of quarterly wage records to assist in the collection of data for program performance measurement.

GOVERNANCE

FEDERAL ROLE

NASDVTEc supports the continuation of the existing federal governance for vocational technical education programs at the United States Department of Education. The Office of Vocational and Adult Education serves as an easily accessible and knowledgeable resource that states and localities rely on for technical assistance and guidance.

STATE ROLE

Vocational technical education dollars should flow to a single state educational agency, as described and defined in the Carl Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act.

States should be provided ample flexibility to administer vocational technical education funds out of the ***education*** agency that best suits that state. Currently, most State Education Agencies administer the federal vocational technical education funds. There are several exceptions though. Hawaii administers its Perkins funds at the university level. Oklahoma has separate vocational education agencies. In Idaho, Minnesota, Montana, Wisconsin, and Colorado, the dollars flow through the post secondary system. Indiana and Kentucky have developed workforce development agencies that govern vocational technical education. Most recently, Arkansas developed a Department of Workforce Education. It is essential that the federal legislation direct these funds to a single state educational agency to assure best utilization of this investment.

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GOVERNANCE (CONTINUED)

Vocational technical education leaders and educators should have guaranteed representation on all boards, collaborative entities or bodies.

Any system that claims to positively impact the lives of youth must have a meaningful partnership with the education community. Furthermore, any system that claims to prepare individuals for high-skill, high wage careers must have a meaningful partnership with the vocational technical education community. State and local vocational education leaders must participate in the planning and implementation of the workforce development/education system. Unless vocational educators can share their experience of progress made and steps currently being taken to better the skills of our current and future workforce, the new system may duplicate efforts that have failed or bypass successful ones currently in place.

We recommend that the state director be a required participant on any state level body that has a direct, indirect or advisory relationship to vocational technical education. The state director is the most qualified individual to provide best professional opinions and expertise on a vocational technical education system. At the local level, vocational technical education leaders, including teachers and administrators, should be required participants on any board or body that has a direct, indirect or advisory relationship to vocational technical education programs.

FUNDING

FEDERAL TO STATE

Because NASDVTEc represents all states and territories, the association does not take a position on the distribution of funds among states. NASDVTEc supports a required minimum grant be made to each state to assure every state has the necessary resources to meet the legislation's goals and intent.

STATE LEVEL

Require 20% of federal vocational technical education funds be reserved for state education leadership and administrative activities.

Effective state leadership is critical to coordination and quality and requires an appropriate investment. As the federal government looks to devolve authority to the states, states need both appropriate authority and funding to assure quality programs. ***Providing 20% for state activities*** (15% for state leadership and 5% for state administration) will be funds well spent as they allow for the continuation of successful initiatives such as: tech prep, integration of academic and vocational education, performance standards, technical assistance, vocational student organizations, curriculum development, career guidance and counseling, innovation, and technology development. State leadership helps localities strengthen their offerings and obtain information from other local, state or national resources that promote effective and current programs.

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FUNDING (CONTINUED)

A ***20% reserve of funds for state leadership and administration*** assures a strong state presence where employers can easily communicate their needs to a single location. This communication will spawn partnerships by matching needs at the local level. The state is the nerve center from which information is disseminated and linkages between employers and local schools can be made. Systems are created with little duplication as the state provides the 'global' perspective, working to assure alignment of local and regional efforts to meet state education and employment goals.

Require a state match for state administration dollars.

The NAVE report found that "state secondary and post secondary vocational agencies received 28% less Perkins money for administration in 1991 - 1992 than 1990 - 1991. Over the three-year period ending in spring, 1993, the average number of employees in state secondary agencies declined from 28.6 to 24.1 . . . " (NAVE, Volume I, page 51. July 1994). As state staff declined, the workload did not. In fact, great advances have taken place since 1993; NAVE indicated that many of these advances were made because of strong state leadership. With state vocational education agencies working with, in many cases, skeleton staffs, the workload cannot continue to grow while authority and responsibility are devolving, staff size decreasing and the demand for high quality increasing. The state administrative match assures that the state is contributing and maintaining its fiduciary responsibility to the upkeep and administrative requirements of the vocational technical education system.

Use of federally allotted state administrative funds is often criticized for being heavily relied on to support state staff positions. A recent GAO report indicated that if the federal government wishes to reduce use of federal funds as a substitute for state funds, "the Congress should **add or strengthen matching** and maintenance of effort provisions for grant programs." (General Accounting Office, Federal Grants: Design Improvements Could Help Federal Resources Go Further, Washington, D.C., December 1996, page 3.)

NASDVTEc strongly supports the requirement that $250,000 or 5% of the state grant, whichever is greater, be dedicated to state administration. For states with 'small' populations, this requirement is essential. All states must meet the same administrative and reporting requirements. This provision assures that every state has adequate resources to meet these reporting and regulatory requirements, provide adequate oversight authority, monitor compliance with the law, provide appropriate accountability of state and local expenditure of federal funds and measure progress toward meeting performance goals.

Allow states to determine the split of funds between secondary and post secondary systems.

To assure that the federal vocational technical education dollars are focused on the populations with the greatest need and are used to meet the state's education and employment goals, states should continue to decide what portion of funds should be dedicated to the secondary and post secondary vocational technical education systems.

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WITHIN STATE DISTRIBUTION

NASDVTEc's members find that the current Perkins formula for secondary schools does not address the needs of rural areas, small districts and charter schools. We look forward to working with you to review possible alternatives that may address these geographic needs and innovative educational settings. NASDVTEc is supportive of a post secondary formula that takes into account Pell Grant recipients and allows for a broad use of waivers if a state can demonstrate that the Pell-based formula does not result in equitable distribution of funds. The minimum grant thresholds of $15,000 for secondary and $50,000 for post secondary schools/consortia should remain waiverable for circumstances where these minimums prohibit or restrict offering quality programs, such as in rural communities.

Require maintenance of effort.
Include a supplement not supplant provision.

Maintenance of effort and 'supplement not supplant' provisions require states to uphold their responsibilities for funding vocational technical education programs, thus assuring that the United States has a vocational technical education system that reaches every community and serves a broad range of needs. State and local contributions are the mainstay support of the nation's vocational technical education infrastructure. Without state and local funds dedicated to infrastructure, federal funds may be redirected, therefore jeopardizing the intended focus of federal funds for vocational technical education - continuous, program improvement.

As state legislatures look for ways to reduce costs and find easy solutions to short-term budget crises, state and local vocational technical education funds are at risk. In 1996, GAO recommended that "the Congress should add or strengthen . . . maintenance of effort provisions for grant programs" (General Accounting Office, Federal Grants: Design Improvements Could Help Federal Resource Go Further, Washington, D.C., December 1996, page 3.) to reduce supplanting of state funds with federal dollars.

Provide at least a $2.5 billion authorization level for vocational technical education.

Vocational technical education must be a national priority, as the need for occupational and skills education and training continue to grow. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that by the year 2000, 65 percent of jobs will require some level of post secondary education, but will not require a baccalaureate degree or higher. As the demand for a skilled workforce grows to the changing economy's needs, investment in vocational technical education programs is a wise and responsible use of the federal resources.

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PROGRAMMATIC FEATURES

State level activities

Vocational technical education has taken great strides to better itself and its offerings to students. It is a system focused on the customer; it has continually reassessed its customers' needs and realigned its efforts to meet those needs. Great investments in time and dollars have resulted in many features currently in place that have proven, positive results for students. Woven throughout the system should be the requirement to address equitable access to quality vocational technical education programs.

NASDVTEc supports the following activities as **required** at the state level:

- professional development;
- development, dissemination, and field testing of curricula and
- assessment (which includes performance standards and measures, data collection and program improvement activities linked to accountability).

NASDVTEc supports the following activities as **permissible** at the state level:

- equity activities;
- promotion of partnerships among businesses, education, industry, labor, community-based organizations and/or governmental agencies;
- tech prep;
- vocational student organizations;
- leadership and instructional programs in technology related to vocational technical education;
- activities for single parents, displaced homemakers, and single pregnant women;
- cooperative education;
- family and consumer science programs;
- career exploration, career guidance and career counseling;
- technical assistance;
- purchase of equipment;
- activities that promote integration of academic and vocational education and
- articulation between secondary and post secondary programs.

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PROGRAMMATIC FEATURES (CONTINUED)

NATIONAL LEVEL ACTIVITIES

NASDVTEc supports the dedication of national activities' dollars to:

- National and State Occupational Information Coordinating Committees
- the National Center for Research in Vocational Education

  and
- a national network for dissemination and coordination of curriculum.

TRANSITION

Allow for a two-year transition period to assure quality implementation.

To achieve the goals of the federal legislation, adequate transition time to plan must be provided. Real change requires sufficient planning time and professional development of system's stakeholders. ***We support the extension of the Perkins Act through a two-year transition period.*** In addition, we recommend that should any regulations be promulgated, they be in place prior to the deadline for development and submission of a state action plan. States currently engaged in comprehensive or consolidated planning should be afforded the option to continue to these reform efforts.

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NASDVTEC'S LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES SUMMARY

- Focus the federal investment in vocational technical education on program improvement and elimination of barriers so that any student can have access to quality programs.
- Enact a piece of authorizing legislation dedicated solely to vocational technical education.
- Build on and expand the current performance standards and measures system.
- Develop a set of common definitions for data reporting purposes.
- Vocational technical education dollars should flow to a single state educational agency, as described and defined in the Carl Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act.
- Vocational technical education leaders and educators should have guaranteed representation on all boards, collaborative entities or bodies.
- The state director be a required participant on any state level body that has a direct, indirect or advisory relationship to vocational technical education.
- **Require 20% of federal vocational technical education funds be reserved for state education leadership and administrative activities.**
- Require a state match for state administration dollars.
- Develop a new formula for distribution to secondary schools that addresses the needs of rural areas, small districts and charter schools.
- NASDVTEc strongly supports the requirement that $250,000 or 5% of the state grant, whichever is greater, be dedicated to state administration.
- Allow states to determine the split of funds between secondary and post secondary systems.
- Require maintenance of effort.
- Include a supplement not supplant provision.
- Provide at least a $2.5 billion authorization level for vocational technical education.
- Allow for a two-year transition period to assure quality implementation.

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